

Research Article

Factors Militating Against the Spread of Adventism in Onitsha

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Abstract

The Seventh-day Adventist church is one of the protestant churches born out of the Millerite movement, imbibed on holistic Christian principles. The emergence of the church in Onitsha, Anambra state, Nigeria is an ambivalent history, however, oral history has it that the church had been in existence before 1954 but was unbeknownst until after the civil war of 1966-1970. Onitsha is one of the most populated cities in Nigeria and is considered the heart of Igbo Land from where the Christian Gospel penetrated all Igbo land; being religiously lucrative in nature and has most of the benefactors that can fuel the growth of any religious movement to a higher level, but in contrast, all these effects are absent as the church drains in membership and infrastructural growth. This study adopted the empirical research method; which relies on observation and particularly verifiable and visible facts, hence, the primary source comprises oral interviews and participant observation. Oral interviews were conducted with three (3) church pastors (past and present), four (4) local chiefs in Onitsha, two (2) church leaders and ten (10) youths (male and female). The secondary source includes books, journal articles and the internet. The data collected were analysed using a sociological approach which interprets the interaction and interplay between religion and society. The findings of the study present six tier factors acting as a deterrent to the spread of Adventism in Onitsha, which includes; sociocultural and socioeconomic factors, African Independent Churches, Pentecostalism, Catholicism and Administrative factors. The study, therefore, calls for a strong awakening of the church, as it educates them on these factors and proposes solutions to these issues.

Keywords

Adventist, Onitsha, Christianity, Culture

1. Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a denomination that grew out of the Millerite Movement in the United States during the middle of the 19th Century. The name Seventh-day Adventist Church was given to the organization and its adherents in 1861. In 1914, David C. Babcock brought the Adventist gospel to Nigeria, where he started his ministry in Erunmu, near Ibadan in Oyo State. Pastor Jesse Clifford ar-

rived in Eastern Nigeria in 1923 to start the Adventist ministry in Umuola, in Ogbor Hill Aba. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is now present in numerous locations throughout Igbo land. And for over 90 years and more, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church has had its full existence in the Eastern part of Nigeria. There was no actual date for the emergence of Adventism in Anambra State, but it is still believed to

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have started before 1954 as documented by Elder G. O Akwarandu, however, he plainly states that it was unknown until after the civil war of 1966-1970 [2]. Knowing that the Seventh-day Adventist has its root for over many decades in the Anambra state, it is still appalling to observe its undeniable malnourished growth both in finance, spirituality, membership, employment/staff, structures, and other delicate areas of interest of the church. Onitsha can be said to be one of the most populated cities in Nigeria with 261,604 people, according to the 2006 National Census [14]. It was considered the heart of Igbo Land from where the Christian Gospel penetrated all Igbo land [15]. With this understanding, it can be said to be religiously lucrative in nature and has most of the benefactors that can fuel the growth of any religious movement and the Seventh-day Adventist church included, to a higher level, but in contrast, all these requirements are perhaps being denied as the church drains in membership and spiritual growth as compared to other contemporary denominations which are after it. Using simple random sampling, questionnaires were administered to 150 sample sizes on regular standing in the church; this data was collected and analyzed systematically, presenting some different factors acting as a deterrent to the spread of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Onitsha district. The secondary source includes books, journal articles and internet sources.

2. Onitsha as a Place

Onitsha or Ònìshà is a city located on the eastern bank of the Niger River, in Anambra State, Nigeria. As a metropolitan city, Onitsha is known for its river port and as an economic hub for commerce, industry, and education. It hosts the Onitsha Main Market, the largest market in Africa in terms of geographical size and volume of goods [17]. As of 2016, Onitsha had an estimated city proper population of 1,080,000 people [13]. As of early 2022, Onitsha has a rising estimated population of 1,553,000. The indigenous people of Onitsha are Igbos and speak the Igbo language. The Onitsha people are referred to as *Ndi Onicha* [17].

Onitsha operates a traditional government headed by the Obi, the titular head of the town who is assisted by *Ndi Ichie*, titled red cap elders or chiefs. Among these are the *Ndi Ichie Ume*, who are the First Class Chiefs. The *Ndi Ichie* are classified into six, namely: *Onowu Iyasele*, *Ajie Ukadiugwu*, *Odu Osodi*, *Onya Ozoma*, *Ogene Onira* and *Owelle Osowa*, with *Onowu Iyasele* as the traditional Prime Minister. There are also other *Ndi Ichie*, who are ranked second class, known as *Ndi Okwa* and third class, known as *Ndi Ichie Okwareze*. The *Ndi Ichie* serves as Council of Advisers to the Obi who solicits their advice in major decisions he makes in the Kingdom [22]. Onitsha is a predominantly Christian city. Islam is also practised in the city by people from Northern and Western Nigeria [11].

3. History of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Onitsha

The emergence of the Adventist church in Anambra state is an ambivalent history, which was because of the lack of records which was kept by the elders and the eyewitnesses who witnessed the event. According to Elder G. O Akwarandu, it was on the 17th of October 1992 that the conference wrote a letter and requested the history of the church, there was no record to show that such a mandate was executed and no record was left in the church for younger generations as records for this church's history until the opportunity came when the church allowed a writer to do so [2].

At the same time, many churches were found destroyed as the war laid a very massive massacre of both lives and properties. Although the church does not have a building previously, there was a great need to secure a new one. The church was therefore conducted in various places and at various periods. From 1973-1978, Pst. P. O Emenogu took over from Pst. Nwosu and the membership increased...., as Pst. Adiele took over, and the awareness so far created by the forbearers started yielding fruits [2]. The Pastor's house that was used for service became inadequate for their members and their children; therefore, there was a great need to find a more accommodating venue for the church service. They succeeded in securing a place at the government primary school, Fegge. When Pastor D. U Nwadike took over from 1985 to 1987, the church started in all directions to consolidate. Membership increased above 100 and the Pastor showed more serious interest in solving the accommodation problem. He followed the members who were assigned to visit Enugu for the allocation of the permanent site regularly [2]. On the other hand Pastor, Dr S. I. Anulugo will be remembered for powerfully establishing the concept of "Systematic Benevolence of Tithe return" which has now taken root and was also trying to use his indigenous affinity to assist the church to secure a government-approved land.

Around 1979, Pastor I. A Ekpendu was sent to replace Pst. Emelogu. It was during the time of Pst. Ekpendu that the Church was organized on the 11th of October 1980. It was during this time that Late Elder C. N. Okeke and his family returned from their sojourn at Jos and were added to the membership. We recorded outstanding weddings during these periods, which helped to popularize the church in the vicinity [2].

Currently, the church has experienced numerous growths in the aspect of membership, building and administrative sphere. However, the growth of the church seems to be militated against, when compared to the growth and development of other denominations that came after it.

This is seen with the comparison of the church membership from 1973 to 2020.

Table 1. Church Membership Growth between 1973-2020.

YEAR	MEMBERSHIP	DIFFERENCE	PASTOR
1972	10	-	Pastor Nwosu
1973 - 1978	31	20	Pastor P. O. Omenogu
1979 – 1981	60	29	Pastor I. A Ekpendu
1982 – 1984	-	-	Pastor Adiele
1985 - 1987	100	49	Pastor D. U Nwadike
1989 - 1994	250	150	Pastor S. I Anuligo
(2010 - 2020)	400	250	Pastor Nnaemeka
2021 - Date	500	100	Pastor Uba Okoye

Hence, the assessment of these factors militating against the spread of Adventism was analysed below.

4. Methodology

This study is empirical; as the name suggests, empirical research relies on observation and particularly verifiable and visible facts which are capable of being replicated in the findings. The primary source comprises oral interviews and participant observation. Oral interviews were conducted with three (3) church pastors (past and present), four (4) local chiefs in Onitsha, two (2) church leaders and ten (10) youths (male and female). The secondary source includes books, journal articles and the internet. The data collected were analysed using a sociological approach which interprets the interaction between religion and society on one hand, and the interplay between society and the church on the other.

5. Findings

5.1. Seventh-day Adventist and Onitsha Culture

The term culture originally referred to people's role in controlling nature. According to the British anthropologist, Taylor, culture is the inclusion of socially acquired knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs and habits [19]. On his part, Bodley defines culture as the patterns of behaviour and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share. As he rightly noted, culture is what distinguishes one human group from the other [4].

From the above definitions, we can deduce that the culture of a people includes all of the following: Their beliefs, how they behave, the language they speak, the rituals they observe, the type of art and technology they possess, their mode of dressing, how they produce and cook their food, the religion they practice, and the political and economic systems they operate. Religion may also be said to be a core part of

the African culture, Idowu, for instance, asserts that religion in its essence is how God as a spirit and man's essential self-communicate [10].

Hence, Africans react to religion, environment or any other aspect of their life based on the effect of their culture on them. Religion in Africa allows people to know about and communicate with supernatural beings such as spirits, gods, and spirits of their dead ancestors. Religion often helps them cope with the things they cannot understand or control, for instance, death and the forces of nature. Culture plays a dominant role in the religion of the Onitsha community.

There are many sociocultural practices among the people of Onitsha which are resilient. These sociocultural practices adversely affect the people's relationship with the Christian religion and the Seventh-day Adventist church included. One of these is the *Ozo*-title (chieftaincy). Titles and title-taking are an integral component of the social life in Igbo land, which carry a lot of aura, honour, dignity and recognition in the community. This situation accounts for the desire of many people to be members of the *Ozo*-title system. *Ozo*-title-taking is one of the most important institutions in Igbo-land and Onitsha included. The taking of the title in Onitsha is seen as a manifestation of an increase in wealth and prestige [9].

In Onitsha town, there are two main district groups of *Ozo*-title namely *Ozo* and *Nzele*. The important thing that should be emphasized about *Ozo*-title is the varied kinds of its various stages and modes of acquiring them, and the ceremonies or rituals connected with them which disagree with the Adventist doctrines [9]. Bosah states emphatically that the *Ozo*-title is the highest cultural ambition of the average Onitsha man because it confers on the recipient the traditional order of priesthood and the highest degree of social standing in the community [6].

Egbo described the *Ozo*-title holders as; occupying a position in Igbo-land comparable to the Peerage in English society, with the same social prestige of 'lord' in the society, as indicated in the new title name the man is given at the suc-

successful end of the title taking [7]. To date, many people still go for title-taking despite all that Christianity has against it. They see the stages of the title-taking as unchristian hence, the condemnation by the church [29].

The issue of reincarnation is also another pressing factor militating against the spread of not just the Seventh-day Adventist church but most other Christian denominations. In defining it; Ekwunife states that; it is the process by which certain categories of the deceased in the African spiritual world of the dead are believed to be mysteriously, but in a real way, capable of incarnating their personalities traits on a new-born physical body of a child, without either destroying the new unique personality of the child or substituting for it [8].

For an Onitsha man or people, it is believed that all persons are supposed to fulfil their destinies to the full. Where life is broken in midstream, reincarnation must: necessarily follow. In Onitsha, it does not necessarily need to be only the deceased who died in adulthood and who attained the status of ancestorhood that can reincarnate; a child of five years who died can reincarnate. He is usually buried at the only entrance to the village square. The reason is to enable the dead child to return quickly to the family by way of reincarnation. The Igbo convince themselves that a child is a reincarnation of a dead ancestor if that child exhibits human features or characteristics of the living dead [27].

The belief in reincarnation among the Onitsha people makes most members of the church and Onitsha community not take the issue of eternity with Christ seriously. Since they believe that if they are not privileged now, in their next world or life, they will try to make it up; thus the common statement, *as I did not go to school in this lifetime; next life, I must be educated*, others could plead by saying *as I do not have money to feed myself three times a day now, in the next life I shall be a wealthy man* [30]. It all makes the strong belief in the Bible's promises and life after death in hell or heaven a non-issue as the church claimed. Although the church has been condemning the belief as being unchristian, all to no avail, because many of the church members, including some elders, still accept the belief in reincarnation, although some of them do not want to be public about it so that they will not be seen as backsliders, not being genuine or be accused of practising syncretism.

In Onitsha, it is common to hear young boys ask each other, this question, (Imago Muo?) Have you been initiated into the masquerade society? It gives him an aura of importance and respectability among his age group, particularly the female sex. It was very clear according to the Onitsha customs that one cannot get to the Umuilo or village boys club without initiation into the masquerade society.

There are various types of masquerades in Onitsha which Amuta categorized, as mid-night masquerades, mainly for children, town criers, annual festival masquerades, masquerades for burial, masquerades that perform during special occasions and big burials, masquerades that perform during the

trial of a masquerade and the greatest and most respected that plays vital role in the governance of the town. These masquerades that feature in the activities of Onitsha are most cherished by the Onitsha people. It will be difficult and even impossible for them to discard such a rich cultural heritage because of anything.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Onitsha frowns at this cultural heritage and disregards those who are known to be involved in Masquerading and often ostracized or not given them the full right they gave to other members who are not involved in this aspect of culture. According to Elder C. J Ogugbuaja; one of the church pioneers in Onitsha, "every act of masquerading is opposed to the true Christian practice and involves the worship of the ancestors" [30].

5.2. The Sabbath Day and Onitsha Commercial Days

One of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church is the Observation of the Sabbath. The history of the Sabbath embraces the period of 6000 years. The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord (Ex. 20: 11). The acts which constituted it such were, first, the example of the Creator; secondly, his placing his blessing upon the day; and thirdly, the sanctification or divine appointment of the day to a holy use. The first who Sabbatized on the seventh day is God the Creator, and the first seventh day is the day on which he thus honoured. The highest of all possible honours does, therefore, pertain to the seventh day.

The Seventh-day Adventist believes that the Sabbath is a symbol of redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is seen by them as God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts. (Gen. 2: 1-3; Exod. 20: 8-11; 31: 13-17; Lev. 23: 32; Deut. 5: 12-15; Isa. 56: 5, 6; 58: 13, 14; Ezek. 20: 12, 20; Matt. 12: 1-12; Mark 1: 32; Luke 4: 16; Heb. 4: 1-11.) [21]

On the other hand, Onitsha is 'an admirable and sought-after city, being the largest market city in Nigeria, and the second largest market in West Africa [20]. It is a major centre of commerce with many famous writings about it, that 'manifested in numerous books (and pamphlets) referred to as "Onitsha Market Literature", thus, making Onitsha a city of pilgrimage to which visitors from all over Nigeria and beyond visit.

The strength of the local economy in Onitsha is derived largely from the expanding commercial activities in the city. Onitsha is known all over Nigeria for its market which is by far the largest in the country, if not West Africa and for the variety of goods obtainable from this market [20]. There is a common saying (*Afia n' ifuro na main market, enweghi ebe ozo iga afu ya n' obodo anyi a*) "if there is any merchandise

that cannot be found in Onitsha then that merchandise cannot be obtained anywhere else in Nigeria". Onitsha has the largest agglomeration of industries in the State [20].

Apart from trading and a few industries, the rest of the people are in the service industry, motor vehicle mechanics, welders etc. The vision of Onitsha in their Economic and commercial sect is to be the foremost commercial nerve centre of Anambra State, the nation and the West African Sub-region for achieving faster socio-economic growth and sustainable human settlements development and management [20].

It is important to note that the majority of the inhabitants of Onitsha are non-indigene; this is mostly because of the commercial and industrial nature of Onitsha [17]. As said by one of the chiefs in Onitsha: "People from far and near and from all around the country, do come to this town mostly for business, it has become more inhabited by non-indigenes that Onitsha is gradually becoming a 'no man's land. It is mostly populated by those who are not indigenes of Onitsha, even Anambra state at most. People come from various places to buy or sell in Onitsha and most cases, these major businesses are being conducted during the weekends (Thursday, Friday and Saturday), and this is to enable those who come from other places apart from Onitsha to buy their goods and travel back to sell them on other weekdays" [28].

Noting the above statement, one can deduce the core reasons of the Onitsha inhabitants, and that is mostly to earn a living. Onitsha is indeed a religious environment but any conviction from any religious denomination on reasons why they should leave their core purpose of coming to Onitsha for church on Saturday is highly declined. There is this general notion that "the Igbos don't joke with their money", this is because an Igbo man would work so hard to make sure he acquires all his needs at all costs, they hustle a lot, they love the good life for themselves, wives, children and family at large. The people of Onitsha do not joke with their business even if it takes them all day of the week to go for it, mostly on Saturdays which happen to be the day they seem to sell the most [34].

In the same vein, the industries and factories which operate in Onitsha also have Saturday as part of their working days, the consideration of an Adventist church member being given an off-duty on that day is very tiny and when they decide to go despite the odds, the consequences might include reduction from salary, feud or quarrels with the company authorities, suspension and even sack. Hence, the non-believers (non-Adventists) will find it hard to join a religious denomination that will endanger them with such risks.

5.3. Seventh-Day Adventist Church and African Independent Churches (AIC)

The origins of African Independent Churches in Nigeria take a central point of reference to the protest against the refusal of the missionary societies to allow Africans' partici-

pation at the top policy-making level in the mission churches during the 19th century. This historic origin goes a very long way but will be briefly considered.

The church was established by a group of laymen from several churches. The conviction that led to the formation of the African Independent Churches as most of these scholars revealed is the fact that an African-led organization would be best able to evangelize the African continent. Within the spec of time, many African Independent Churches were established [23].

Prayer is more or less a business for some African independent churches. In most churches, special places are set aside as prayer grounds and these sacred places have names such as the place of refuge, protection ground, mercy land, etc. Most AICs pray with items they refer to as prayer materials. This feature is common with virtually all types of AICs. In their prayer jobs, items such as candles, incense, model prayer books, book of psalms and palm fronds are used. These materials are usually called prayer aids by their users [23].

There seems to be a state of muddiness in the differentiation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from African Independent Churches mostly the white garment churches. This might be a result of a stumbling notion that people have about the word "Sabbath" or Saturday worshippers. Whenever there is a mention of the Seventh-day Adventist church with further explanation of its bible-based observation of the last day of the week (Saturday) as the holy Sabbath of the Lord and our day of worship, the first to ring on the of an individual without such knowledge before would be the white garment church. And it sets most individuals off because they would not like to associate with such a denomination whose liturgical system seems strange to them [33].

5.4. Pentecostalism

Anderson re-affirms that global Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity in all its diversity is the fastest expanding religious movement in the world today. He also pointed out that Pentecostalism has profoundly affected all forms of Christianity in Nigeria [16]. Achunike reveals how Pentecostalism has influenced Catholic priests and seminarians. The author cited examples of some areas of influence to buttress his claim and drive home the message. These include areas of ethics and church liturgy, preaching of good homilies, singing of choruses after the manner of the Pentecostals, copied the flamboyant lifestyle of the Pentecostals. Evil spirits or devil-mania have gained currency among Christians as a result of the Pentecostal emphasis on it [1]. Pentecostal influence has indeed cut across every other Christian body.

Presently, there is an open display of the Pentecostal experience in the mainline churches. Pentecostalism entered the Nigeria religious space in the 1970s and brought with it a new liturgy. With an entirely different style, the movement has affected life in general, particularly in Nigerian Christian

churches [16].

It was in this atmosphere of spiritual paucity and poverty that “Prayer House” movements began in Onitsha. The Prayer House groups not only prayed a lot, but they also preached from the Bible however, an attentive listener could easily identify subtle deception. They preach and teach much but their sermons and doctrines seem to be far from the gospel. The operation of the “Holy Spirit” was quite bizarre. The “Holy Spirit” as they teach would fall upon only the special ones and when it did come, the manifestations were more or less demonic convulsions. Under the power of the “Holy Spirit”, they would “prophesy”, pray for healing and carry on in an exhibitionist and self-important manner. There was a lot of discipline for spiritual power by way of fasting and a very long period of prayer for both the prophets and their congregations. The healers were successful in the act of healing. They sometimes healed even those who were suffering from incurable diseases. They surrounded themselves with religious paraphernalia and other emblems, and they slept with Bible under their pillow and wore crosses blessed by the prophet for purpose of protection [32].

It is, therefore, not surprising that those who became the cardinal Evangelicals and Pentecostals in Igbo land had themselves been involved in one prayer house or the other, it was there that most people who had a thirst for the deeper spiritual things ended up, thinking they had found God in the prayer houses. Pentecostals understand prophecy only in the sense of foretelling and not in the sense of forth-telling, and in most cases, they confuse speaking in tongues with prophecy. In this sense, some members claim to be prophesying when they speak in tongues and try to interpret them [36]. They lay special stress on the gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12.

The entirety of their message is now sorely placed on the emphasis on miracles and prosperity. And as it seems to be the core message that attracts individuals and whereby a careful reproach on their sinful lives is merely considered or not looked at all. People seem not to want a setting where their sins will be told to them, where they are met with the rational reality of what life should be in Christ but they seem to prefer the illusive state of mind and do not mind if they are being extorted to their disadvantage [35].

Many ministers have turned the fold of God into a money-making business, the fold has been brainwashed into falsehood and they most time contextualize or misquote the bible to suit these evil purposes. They create mayhem in homes, societies and nations and the masses are subjugated to these religious neuroses injected in them, disarming their rational alertness, stripping them of their logical conscience and leaving them vulnerable to mental subordination [5].

At this point one might start to wonder how this religious movement might serve as a pervasive measure to the growth of Adventism in Onitsha, well, Onitsha is a commercial area as emphasized in the previous points, and the core aim of its inhabitants is to make money at any extent possible. These

“one-man-churches” as it’s been called, only give prosperity messages to the people, allowing them to hear what is pleasant to their ears alone in terms of prosperity messages, business success and job promotion and denying them the ultimate need of their soul which is salvation.

There is this popular saying they have which is “*ka anyi gaba ebe ona ememe*” that is “we only go to where it is happening”. The people are been lured to only where they see miracles being performed, where the blind see, the lame walk and sometimes the dead even resurrected. They wish not to know or care to know the genuine nature of such powers. They only care to receive their miracles, get words about those who are after their life and what they should do to get a booming business or a promotion at work.

People blindly troop into these churches because they are appeased by the lies and deceits they are been entertained with, and any atom of truth to them most times seems like a rebel against their belief. This might be a big pill to swallow or hard to admit but the crowd is been swept into these churches and it becomes hard to flush this poison from their mind and let them come to the enlightenment of the real truth.

The Seventh-day Adventist church is a church that focuses its mission and creed on the core belief of the second coming of Christ. It operates in a system which centres only on the bible and the bible alone (*Sol Scriptura*) and thus, they seem to be practically different from what seems to be the trend in Christendom, hence, today the above-stated reasons are also part of the problems militating against the spread of Adventism. And as the bible also warns: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (Matthew 7: 13)

5.5. Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church has in the course of Onitsha's history and various dimensions demonstrated itself as the custodian and promoter of Christian religious value; one may strictly assert that they have always played this role flawlessly. Statistically, the Roman Catholic church seems to have the highest range of membership compared to any other denomination in Onitsha with an estimated number of over 150,000 members [9].

Notwithstanding, the religious mechanism behind the success of their growth may be classified as one of the factors militating against the spread of many other denominations. This situation is verified with no bias notion, and also bearing in mind that every denomination has every right to structure a possible way of evangelism and winning souls. Nevertheless, a compromise of what seems to be the core standards of Christianity seems to be seen in their mechanism for church growth.

Some traditional norms and rituals like the *Ozo*-title, the rite of passage ritual (that is the rituals for entering another stage of life) and *Mmuo* or Masquerades are seen as having

supernatural qualities. The *Mmuo* for instance was regarded as *Onyenwe-Obodo*, *Onye nwe-ala* (Lord of creation or owner of the soil) and so on. These attributes, the early missionaries did not agree with, because they believed that the owner of all creation is the Lord Almighty [18].

Muo or *Mmanwu* in Igbo land is seen as a secret society where knowledge, activities and even sometimes purposes are concealed and kept back from the knowledge of others; as affirmed by Awolalu and Dopamu who state that: the *Mmo* is the Igbo principal secret society. It is like the Yoruba *Egungun* in that it impersonates the dead as Masquerades. The masker usually features prominently in funeral ceremonies. But they also appear in public during important festivals [3].

The Roman Catholic Church in Onitsha gives opportunities to these cultures and imbibed them into their liturgical activities, hence, permitting religious syncretism.

The report of the unanimous agreement between the Ukpok Catholic Community and the members of the *Mmanwu* society of Ukpok town with its terms laid down by the parish priest; the condition under which the Christians of the Catholic Community may lawfully participate in *Mmanwu* in Ukpok;

That no charms be made, kept or used by the *Mmanwu* society. Any previous charms made, kept or used by the said society are discarded.

That all "*Obom*" or play-grounds used by the masquerade are to be blessed by the Rev. Father

That swearing by a Catholic during his initiation into the society must be on the Bible only

That Catholic women and girls must not be required to go out at night to participate in any activities connected with masquerading.

That the Catholic of Ukpok is adequately represented in the policy-making committee of the *Mmanwu* society.

That initiation into society is entirely free. That is to say, no molestation or force is to be exerted on any person to enter society against his or her will.

A person already initiated and wishing for some reason to discontinue membership is to inform the policy-making committee of the society for their consideration and can do so freely.

That no masquerading is to be done on Sundays except in an emergency - unanimously agreed to by the ruling committee. Catholics may not participate in its *Mmanwu* for that emergency.

That an oath confirming acceptance and promise to abide by these conditions be sworn by both parties and it was accordingly sworn on the 17 days of August 1970.

Other towns that have done similar things are Ihembosi on September 9, 1970, and Ozubulu on October 10, 1970; the document is in the Parish archives of the Catholic Church Ozubulu [18].

Up till date, the Roman Catholic Church still allows its members to go for the title-taking despite all that Christianity

has against it and even celebrates those who got them into the church. People love it when they get to live in a state of total moral anarchy or total freedom to live their life without constraint. The Roman Catholic Church seems to have placed people on that platter, where they no longer bother to wonder if their lifestyles and practices are in tune with biblical principles. The deeper understanding regarding the word of God is restrained because even religious activities have become mere legalism.

5.6. Church Administration

One of the major problems facing the world today is the issue of leadership. The tremendous success of any nation, church, organization or group rests mostly on the type of leadership or administrative strategies that is being run. The growth, development and success of a church depend solely on the administration; hence, if the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Onitsha is militated against, then one has to dive into the assessment of the type of administration it runs upon [37]. The administrative circle of a church should not be centred on specific church personnel alone, as it should run through health, education, welfare and social control as well [34].

The personification of church offices by some individuals for selfish benefits has always been the "cricket eating up the harvest" of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Onitsha. Leaders seem to serve their insatiable wants rather than the core needs of the church. According to Emmanuel Kent "Religion is made out of human needs and should be a projection of unconscious relationship that is a reflection of emotional relationship" [12]. The spiritual needs of some members are not met as they see the attendance of church as a mere legalistic.

In the aspect of youth administration, the Seventh-day Adventist church in Onitsha has done tremendously good work; its youth are mentally, intellectually and morally equipped. But that will not be considered if the spiritual aspect is left out. In generations to come, the now youths will be the then fathers and what use will they be when they have lost their spiritual motivational purpose? There are barely any encouragements or sponsorships for any youth who might wish to take up the mantle of pastoral profession or evangelistic career; they are made to see the stagnation of choosing such a path. One of the defining features of good leadership is when a leader consistently develops other leaders [31].

The system of education instituted from the beginning of the world by God was to be a model for man. Adventist nationwide hold that strong concept of education as the best means for spiritual, mental, physical and sociological growth. "Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings, and never before was its diligent study as important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great

as confront them today” [25]. The Seventh-day Adventists in Onitsha seemed to withdraw their eyes from this which seems to be the most delicate and important part of the ministry. Less or no interest has been placed on education and thus, leaving academic growth and development at the mercy of other denominations and cultures. They are subdued to imbibe the religious belief of other denominations which might seem to be contrary to that of Adventists [26].

Again, “the principles of health reform are found in the Word of God. The gospel of health is to be firmly linked with the ministry of the Word. It is the Lord’s design that the restoring influence of health reform shall be a part of the last great efforts to proclaim the gospel message.” Medical missionary work is the right hand of the gospel. It is necessary for the advancement of the cause of God. Through it, men and women are led to see the importance of the right habits of living [24].

Medical missionary work brings to people the gospel of release from suffering. It can be said to be the pioneering work of the gospel. It is the practical aspect of the gospel which reviews the compassion of Christ. There is a great need for this work, and the world is open to it [24]. The church has neglected this very important task as everyone is more interested in their individual affairs and what they stand to gain from every activity they engage in. the church can barely boost a health infrastructure where the sick are being tended to or medical missionary which may serve as a means of evangelism for the public or laity.

6. Conclusion

Onitsha is considered the heart of Igbo Land from where the Christian Gospel penetrated all Igbo land [15]. With this understanding, it can be said to be religiously lucrative in nature and has most of the benefactors that can fuel the growth of any religious movement and the Seventh-day Adventist church included, to a higher level, but in contrast, all these requirements are perhaps being denied as the church drains in membership and spiritual growth as compared to other contemporary denominations which are after it. The study analyses the factors militating against the spread of Adventism and tenders the need for further and deeper study of the culture of the Onitsha people to enhance a good relationship between them and the church.

Abbreviations

AIC African Independent Churches

Author Contributions

Ephraim Makuochukwu Ogugbuaja: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Soft-

ware, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Enoch Omijeh: Data curation, Investigation, Resources

Sobalaje Adewuyi: Resources, Validation, Visualization

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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